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Argument Essay

Accessibility is important in all parts of society, but it is most important in an academic setting, like college. All students should be allowed the same opportunities as other students and not be limited by physical factors. Syracuse University, located in central New York, is notorious for receiving copious amounts of snow during the winter months. As one could imagine, this snow could impede even the most physically able students from making it to class safely and on time. Disabled student all over campus want the University to make the snow removal process timelier and efficient. In an article written by Mandy Hiens for the *Daily Orange,* Liat Ben-Moshe, a doctoral student at Syracuse, says to “look at Canada and other snowy places; it is possible to remove snow to a certain extent, we have to make more of an effort on campus.” Disabled students have also complained that some of the buildings are difficult to manage like Link hall or the Carnegie Library. These are important buildings because a whole department is in Link and classes are sometimes held in the Carnegie Library. Is it feasible to have a campus as large and Syracuse University and have easy accessibility weather wise and building wise?

Accessibility in a college setting is important for disabled students and to allow for all people to have equal opportunities. At Syracuse University in the heavy snowfall in the winter makes it difficult to keep sidewalks well maintained and free of snow. At the moment the University has set up specific high priority pathways throughout the university. These pathways include the quad, areas around the Newhouse School and the Schine Student Center. It is not feasible to have most of Syracuse University plowed by the time classes begin or even during the day. Disabled students come from all over campus to attend classes, and these pathways may not help them at all during the day. For example the sidewalks near the College of Law and the Crouse Building are not included in the higher priority sidewalks. There is also no guarantee that the sidewalks will be plowed even though they are a priority. It is not feasible for the school to accommodate all disabled student’s needs for accessibility during the winter months.

In “Reassigning Meaning,” Simi Linton writes that “if we, as a society, place the onus on individuals with disabilities to work harder to “compensate” for their disabilities or to “overcome” their condition or the barriers in the environment, we have no need for civil rights legislation or affirmative action” (Linton 229). She believes that it is up to society and in this case the University to ensure that people with disabilities can live without having to be work harder than a non-disabled person to enjoy the same environment. The University needs to make sure all snow and ice is removed from sidewalks to allow for safe and easy access in the winter months. Some people may say that this is not feasible for Syracuse to have all sidewalks cleared but Syracuse is making an effort. Syracuse University hires an outside contractor to remove snow during the winter. The University has also set up a program in the winter called “The University Neighborhood Partnership Committee” (UNP), to help snow sidewalks. This program is working with the contractor and community to keep the snow off of sidewalks around campus. The Office of Disabilities of Syracuse University also allow student with disabilities to submit their schedule to help ensure that the sidewalks will be cleared in time for them to get to class. If the sidewalk isn’t clear, a student could call the Grounds Department to help with snow removal. This is evidence that it is feasible to have clear pathways from snow in the winter for students with disabilities.

On the Syracuse campus snow is not the only thing impeding accessibility. Some of the buildings on campus are difficult to get into if one is handicapped, in particular Link Hall and Carnegie Library. These two buildings were built in 1970 and 1907 respectively. These building have little to no access for disabled students. The Syracuse University website provides a map with a description of Link Hall’s handicapped access. The description explains that the one accessible entrance is in the hall connected to Link (Slocum Hall) and can be accessed via the basement. The website also states that most places are accessible though the elevator except the Auditorium Level. The Carnegie Library’s handicap access is on the southeast side of the building which has push button automatic doors. The elevator is restricted but the Library staff will help a student with disabilities if need be. Renovations to these two buildings to make them more handicap accessible would be costly.

Link Hall and Carnegie Library could become more handicaps accessible with a few minor adjustments. The university could construct a small ramp to Link Hall; even one ramp would be easier to manage than going through Slocum Hall. The ramp would be relatively inexpensive, instead of renovating the entrance to the building. The Carnegie Library could give keys or passes to disabled students so they could easily navigate the building without the help of the librarians. Link hall could also post signs of where the handicap access is located, in order for people to find it faster.

Easy access for people with disabilities is an important aspect in all parts of society. No one should be limited by any physical aspect of a building or other structure. It is up to society to provide proper access to buildings. School and other entities should be held accountable if someone cannot gain knowledge, because they have a disability or use a wheel chair. Universal Design is a defined in “Universal Design of Instruction: Definition, Principles, and Examples” by Sheryl Burgstahler as “the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design” (Burgstahler 1). This could be incorporated to doors, walkways, and entrances. She continues in the article to explain how to design universally. She says that it is important to design something that “accommodates a wide range of individual preferences” and to design something that can be used efficiently and comfortably with minimal effort (Burgstahler 2). If Syracuse could implement this design practice with future buildings, the school would not have to worry about the accessibility of a building compromising its aesthetics.

It is a student’s right to have easy accessibility throughout a university as large as Syracuse. Due to the sporadic locations of the dorms at Syracuse it is hard to access main campus quickly and with minimal effort. In order to allow easier access, Syracuse University should set up a dorm in which handicap students could live. This dorm would be integrated with non-disabled students in order to facilitate interaction between students. This would allow the campus to make it easier to make sure paths are plowed in time for classes and all aspects of the building would be handicap accessible. The integration of nondisabled students keeps the school from segregating the students and instead promotes friendship. This dorm would be especially helpful because the school could provide assistance and support for disabled students. For example class speaker Greg Callan said that people with disabilities often find themselves depressed or overwhelmed. It is important that the University is able to help student who feel this way, thus making these dorms a helpful resource during the college experience.

Many parents or people in the disabled community would argue that is oppressive to student with disabilities by keeping most disabled students in a specific dorm located close to central campus. This, however, would not be the case. Non-disabled students would be roommates and on the same floor as disabled students. Early interaction with non-disabled students is important for disabled students and allows them to be more confident while making friends. It also teaches those students who are not disabled that it is okay to have friends that are disabled. It would be in the best interest of both Syracuse University and the disabled students to have a dorm located close to campus and have all accessible aspects of the dorm.

In “The Dimensions of Disability Oppression,” author James Charlton, defined oppression as the “phenomenon of power in which relations between people and between groups are experienced in terms of domination and subordination, superiority and inferiority.” Syracuse University is not oppression students, but to avoid any conflicts and to set a precedent among colleges the University should set up plans to make their campus more accessible. Adding a few ramps, building dorms located closer to campus, and having easier signs to read are all important aspects to help accessibility of the campus increase. All students have the right to a good education; the school at which they are at should not inhibit them from doing so.

It may behoove Syracuse University to set up a dorm building with primarily disabled students, but have it integrated with non-disabled students.

<http://www.syr.edu/news/articles/university-neighborhood-snow-removal-01-10.html>

<http://www.city-data.com/top2/c464.html>

<http://www.smith.edu/deanoffaculty/Burgstahler.pdf>

<http://map.syr.edu/query.php?building=6>

Reassigning meaning